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DSU immigrant students fear Trump's DACA decision

Scott Goss, The News Journal

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(Photo: William Bretzger, The News Journal)

Tania Hernandez Orozco has been dreading Sept. 5 for months.

"I marked it on my calendar, but I've tried not to think about it too hard," the 19-year-old said. "I have no control over what happens, and that might be the scariest part."

A freshman at Delaware State University, she is among [800,000 people who could face deportation \(/story/news/nation/2017/09/01/daca-immigrants-terrified-president-trump-decides-their-fate/625619001/\)](#)

if President Donald Trump phases out a federal program that protects undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children.

Those young people are currently protected from deportation under the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program \(/story/news/politics/2017/09/01/daca-undocumented-immigrants-protections/624678001/\)](#) created in 2012 by the Obama administration.

Many Republicans are vehemently opposed to DACA and characterize the program as an overreach by the former president. [GOP leaders have told Trump they plan to sue \(/story/news/politics/texlege/2017/06/29/texas-threatens-trump-administration-lawsuit-over-daca-work-permits/440721001/\)](#) if he does not announce an end to the program by Tuesday.

"We are a country of immigration but, more importantly, legal immigration," said Sussex County Councilman Rob Arlett, who chaired Trump's Delaware campaign. "These undocumented children are a big financial burden on taxpayers, and I think there are better ways to address these kids."

RELATED: [Carney calls Trump's offshore drilling plan 'counter-productive' \(/story/news/politics/2017/08/22/carney-calls-trumps-offshore-drilling-plan-counter-productive/591509001/\)](#)

RELATED: [Immigration fears steer some Delawareans to avoid health care, social services \(/story/opinion/contributors/2017/04/04/immigration-fears-steer-some-delawareans-avoid-health-care-and-social-services/100034054/\)](#)

The DACA program does not offer blanket protections and is not a path to citizenship. People must apply to be covered by the program, which is available only to those who came to the U.S. before 2007 and were 15 or younger when they arrived. DACA recipients also must have a clean criminal record.

The Migration Policy Institute estimates there are 1.9 million young immigrants in the U.S. eligible to apply for DACA. But many have not sought the program's protections, fearing what might happen if they reveal themselves to the federal government.



Maria Fernanda Lima (seated) and Tania Hernandez Orozco are both Delaware State University students who would be impacted by any changes to DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. (Photo: William Bretzger, The News Journal)

"My family and I thought about it a lot, did the research and decided it was better than the alternative," said 6, a nursing student at DSU whose mother brought her to the U.S. from Brazil when she was 4.

"DACA opened everything up for me because it meant I could find a job and get a driver's license without worrying about going to jail or worse," she said. "But it was scary to announce myself to the government, and it still is considering what's happening now."

RELATED: [What is DACA and why might Trump end it? \(/story/news/politics/2017/09/01/daca-undocumented-immigrants-protections/624678001/\)](#)

Fernanda Lima and Hernandez Orozco are among about 75 DACA recipients at DSU thanks to a full scholarship provided by [TheDream](#). (<http://www.thedream.us/US>), a privately endowed fund started by Don Graham, the former publisher of the Washington Post, and a small group of philanthropists. DSU is one of only five universities and colleges in the nation to partner with the group.

[The first group of 34 DACA recipients \(/story/news/education/2016/10/09/what-s-like-dreamer-dsu/91674394/\)](#) who attended the school last year posted a cumulative grade-point average of 3.7, said DSU spokesman Carlos Holmes.

"These are the kinds of students we want," he said. "They do not take their education and the opportunity they've been given for granted."

Hernandez Orozco was 6 years old when her father brought her and her younger brother across the border from Mexico, a multiday journey that began after they finished trick-or-treating on Halloween in 2004.

The family settled in South Carolina, where Hernandez Orozco graduated with honors while working at a Sonic Drive-In, a job she landed after being accepted to DACA.

Fernanda Lima grew up in Georgia after her mother brought her and her older sister to the U.S. on a travel visa and then never returned.

"She had been assaulted and robbed twice in San Paulo, where we are from," she said. "She didn't want us to experience anything like that. And while being undocumented in the U.S. makes life difficult, at least we know we are safe."

Both women said they are fearful their dreams of finding the better life their parents hoped for could end after Labor Day.

"It's a concern I've been dealing with since my parents brought me here," Hernandez Orozco said. "I never knew if they would still be home when I got back from school or if immigration was going to come to school for me. Now I still don't know if I'll be able to stay in school or even the country."

Delaware's congressional delegation has publicly urged Trump to keep DACA in place, arguing that many of the young immigrants have never known any other home and did not choose to come here illegally.

[Hundreds of governors, state attorneys general \(/story/news/world/2017/08/30/1-850-u-s-leaders-trump-dont-kill-dreamer-protection-program/615653001/\)](#), [business leaders \(/story/tech/2017/08/31/tech-industry-prepares-new-trump-fight-over-daca-dreamer-protection-program/622897001/\)](#) and even [some Republican lawmakers \(/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/09/01/gop-lawmakers-urge-trump-leave-daca-alone-let-congress-handle-legislation/625169001/\)](#) also have called on Trump to leave DACA in place.

The White House says a final decision will not be announced until Tuesday.

Until then, Fernanda Lima and Hernandez Orozco say they are doing their best to focus on what they can control: their school work.

"There's no way to know what's going to happen so I'm trying to stay focused on my higher goal of becoming a neonatal nurse" Fernanda Lima said. "I love the idea of helping babies that don't have the power to fight for themselves."

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